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ABSTRACT

Noting that use of the reading-related components of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by state education agencies has ranged from extensive to moderate to limited, this paper presents case studies of the ways in which states have used the NAEP models. The first half of the paper describes extensive use by Minnesota and Connecticut, moderate use by the state of Maine, and limited use by Wyoming and North Dakota. The second half of the paper discusses future uses of the NAEP methodology and materials and lists questions that state education agencies might want to ask when considering adaptation of NAEP reading components. (HTH)

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USES OF NAEP IN READING BY STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES

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USES OF NAEP IN READING BY STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES

In the 1970's and early 1980's, use of the reading-related components of the National Assessment of Educational Progress by state education agencies (referred to in most states as "the State Department of Education") has ranged from extensive to moderate, or to limited utilization. Sebring, in 1981 and 1982, conducted a series of case studies pertaining to how state education agencies had used NAEP in any and all ways. Among her findings specifically related to reading were the following:

Examples of Extensive Utilization

Minnesota. The Minnesota Statewide Assessment Program has relied heavily on the NAEP model since the early 1970's. Comprehensive assessments in reading were made in 73-74, 80-81 (secondary grades), and 81-82 using intact classroom samples. Comparisons were made between Minnesota students, Central Region students, and national sample students on the items that were taken directly from NAEP.

A report was then presented to the State Board of Education. It thereby became an official part of the public record, resulting in extensive radio, TV, and newspaper coverage.

Department of Education personnel responsible for reading provided assistance to a local IRA council which produced materials and workshops aimed at improving achievement in those areas where student performance was low. A second major utilization was realized through the state's Piggyback Program, which enabled local districts to assess their students with statewide assessment measures. In 1974, 3% of Minnesota's districts participated in the Piggyback Program, while in 1980-81, 56% were involved. Evaluations of these two uses indicated that recommendations and materials stemming from assessment data had an impact on classroom instruction. A third utilization of assessment findings was in the form of information the state Director of the Assessment Section frequently offered to legislative committees and individual legislators. However, in Minnesota no statewide decisions were made by the legislature because the philosophy of the state favors decision-making at the local school level.

Connecticut. Extensive use of NAEP reading material was made in Connecticut since the Connecticut Assessment of Educational Progress was modeled after NAEP in terms of its basic goals, design, and implementation. Reading was assessed in 71-72, 75-76, 77-78 and 78-79 in order to make state, Northeast regional, and national comparisons.

After each assessment, reports were developed and sent in brochure form to legislators, parents, and local boards of education and in more detailed form to teachers, administrations, and public libraries. Interpretation workshops were also presented to representatives of approximately 100 communities.

Fifty-five districts opted to have all or a sample of their students tested in reading and compared against themselves and/or statewide and national samples on the 1975-76 reading assessment. Forty-four districts used this option with the 1978-79 reading assessment. Assessment data was held confidential to the districts, but the Connecticut Department of Education sponsored meetings at which district data were interpreted without violating confidentiality. District cost amounted to $1.95 per student tested.

Statewide assessment results were used to formulate recommendations related to reading areas needing improvement. In 1980, reading consultants produced a booklet for teachers containing suggestions for "getting main ideas." This aid was distributed to all schools in Connecticut.

In 1981, work on the State's Ten-Year Plan was in progress. The Connecticut Assessment of Educational Progress provided logitudinal and comparative data and national and state comparisons in reading (and 10 other subjects) so that local schools and the state would be able to cooperate in planning, implementing, and evaluating school programs. Since local control of schools is strong the Connecticut, recommendations emerging from the assessments and state plans will be implemented at district levels.

Example of Moderate Utilization

Maine. After two panels of Maine educators reviewed NAEP objectives, the NAEP model was selected to assist the state in its various assessments. Nine and seventeen year-olds were assessed in reading in 1973 and 1974, respectively. Forty-seven of the 75 items used to assess reading in 1974 were taken from NAEP, with the remaining items developed especially for the state. Sampling procedures paralleled NAEP techniques. Reading items were placed in three packages and then given to three separate samples of students. State department personnel were trained to administer the reading (and writing) tests and used paced audio tapes to give test directions.

Reports were developed explaining the meaning of significant differences among the test performance of Maine, regional, and national samples. Achievement was also summarized for various groups in terms of such considerations as socio-economic status, levels of parental education, community size, and so on. It was pointed out that Maine educators needed to decide the practical significance of any differences that were noted, though. In order to establish frameworks for evaluating performance in reading, over 200

teachers were randomly selected to judge minimal, desired, and predicted outcomes for 15 reading items and the difficulty and appropriateness of six reading passages. A Reading Interpretation Committee (comprised of 16 elementary, secondary, and university teachers) was then formed and produced a report detailing interpretations and recommendations for educators working at local school, state department, and collegiate levels in Maine.

Other reports of varying complexity were sent to district superintendents, principals, and curriculum supervisors. Three thousand copies of the reading (and writing) assessment of 9 year-olds conducted in 1974 were sent out; articles appeared in newspapers of the state; a series of articles appeared in the Maine Teacher. Finally, the state education agency in Maine issued a report noting that the 1974 reading assessment resulted in a district level in-service program related to reading and writing and a state department of education developed approach to the teaching of basic skills.

For the 1977-78 statewide assessment of basic skills, 38 NAEP reading items were used for the eighth grade test, while 40 were incorporated the eleventh grade test. A citizen's committee was formed to work together with the Maine state department in writing such interpretations and recommendations as the following: the legislature should not mandate minimum competency requirements for graduation; the state should provide technical assistance to schools related to establishing performance standards, to using, and to interpreting assessment data; the state should offer districts an assessment model which they could choose to adopt or modify.

Thus, in Maine, the emphasis in the early 1980's was upon evaluation at the district level. The state department of education's role was to provide leadership and technical assistance as districts carried out their own assessments of achievement at not only minimum, but also maximum, that is, excellence levels. The only requirement was that the public be informed as to student progress toward expected learning outcomes. In this regard districts were free to decide whether they wished to use NAEP objectives and items and could call upon appropriate state department of education staff for technical help.

Examples of Limited Utilization

Wyoming. In 1971 individuals from the College of Education at the University of Wyoming, the state Department of Education, the ESEA State Advisory Committee, the Wyoming Education Association, 20 professional education associations, and the general public established educational goals and objectives. After items from a wide variety of sources, including NAEP, were reviewed, an assessment in reading and four other areas was conducted involving high school seniors.

However, although NAEP item development procedures and some NAEP items were employed, assessment results were not disseminated

broadly. State department personnel were able to make assessment information available to teachers at the district level, but could not mandate use of the information because dictates of this nature would violate local control of schools.

North Dakota. In 1976-77, NAEP objectives, items, and data were used in a statewide reading assessment of fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade students. Approximately 1400 youngsters at each of these grade levels are tested by means of a stratified (on the basis of school enrollment) random sampling procedure. Word identification and recognition, word and sentence comprehension, comprehension of longer discourse, and reading study skills items were selected from NAEP released exercises and the Minnesota assessment and then were administered by district staffs. The results were noted in terms of correct answers related to each objective and subobjective and comparisons were reported between state students, Central Region students, and the national NAEP sample. Findings led to various recommendations in state department reports (e.g., that content area reading should be emphasized, that districts use various assessment objectives in reading to write objectives). Schools participating in the assessment received a short report showing how they stood up against statewide results, but comprehensive comparisons could not be drawn because few schools had decided to administer all of the reading assessment items.

Finally, concise, readable reports of the assessment were sent to administrators in each of the state's districts. The state Right to Read Coordinator included assessment information into various workshops for teachers, principals, and superintendents conducted 1976-1980. Recommendations (distributed in booklet form) emphasized the use of criterion referenced measures rating various aspects of existing reading programs to ascertain needed changes. Aside from these efforts, the state department, due to limited resources, was not able to disseminate and encourage widespread use of the assessment results in the schools of the state.

Reports summarizing the assessment were also sent to the State Board of Education and to the Legislature, showing how students in the state compared with the assessment performance of students nationwide. Since state funds account for more than 60% of local school district budgets, legislators viewed student performance on criterion-referenced and norm-referenced measures with interest.

Certainly the use of NAEP reading components by state education agencies cannot be defined on the basis of the experiences of five states. LaPointe and Koffler (1982) have asserted their belief that the general impact of NAEP has been less than strong, but Tyler (1982) has challenged their assertion. Perhaps judgments in this matter can be made,

though, when the results of a December 1982 survey conducted by the NAEP Utilization and Liaison Department are in. The survey was sent to all SEA's and contained questions related to past uses of NAEP objectives, items, results, and methodology as well as other queries related to future and potential uses of NAEP materials and services. In the questionnaire, new plans were described pertaining to the following:

1. new and continuing forms of general and technical assistance to SEA's;
2. joint SEA/NAEP development of objectives and items;
3. concurrent SEA/NAEP assessment arrangement involving a revised item release policy (SEA's could use some or all NAEP items the same year they are used nationally and thereby make more timely and less expensive comparisons).

Future Uses

The experiences of the five states described above demonstrate that SEA's have adapted or adopted the reading aspects of NAEP methodology and materials in keeping with the more general constraints and needs of their respective circumstances. Involvement in the future will continue to vary in light of political, fiscal, and "local control of schools" considerations.

In terms of "test consumer" concerns, SEA's may want to ask questions such as the following when they consider alignments with NAEP reading components:

Example Questions Related to Purposes for Testing

1. How can NAEP help us analyze reader strengths and weaknesses in skills, attitudes, habits, and interests?

2. How can NAEP help us develop reading curriculum guidelines in terms of our prioritized educational and vocational needs and in terms of both minimum competencies and standards of excellence?

3. How can NAEP help us guide and place students in the K-12 sequence as well as in community college, college, or employment sectors?

4. How can NAEP help us determine whether reading is declining, remaining stable, or improving?

5. How can NAEP help us randomly sample students, average their performance, and come up with composite scores for the various aspects of maturity in reading?

6. How can NAEP help us provide data to legislative committees so that we can build recommendations for additional funds for certain areas of need (e.g., reading in the middle school and at the secondary levels)?

7. How can NAEP help us determine whether our remedial reading programs are effective?

8. In what specific ways will NAEP data contribute to improved citizens' and legislators' understanding of reading achievement?

9. In what specific ways will NAEP data and services enable our SEA to provide assistance in the area of reading at district and classroom levels?

Example Questions Related to Validity and Reliability

1. Do NAEP test items in general and in particular match our state's prioritized goals and objectives of reading instruction (instructional validity)?

2. How well will NAEP reading items correlate with our students' scores on other tests, with school grades, with future grades, and with reading performance in nonschool settings (statistical validity)?

3. Is the content of the NAEP reading section approved by "disinterested," that is, unbiased, external reviewers, including testing experts, reading specialists, researchers, administrators, teachers, school board members, representatives from business and labor, and students themselves? How were these external reviews obtained?

4. What useful comparisons will NAEP items provide the SEA personnel?

5. Why should state department personnel select NAEP items, procedures, and results instead of or in addition to items contained in norm-referenced tests used and respected nationwide?

6. How have NAEP items been reviewed for sex, ethnic, geographical, and other forms of bias?

7. In what ways are NAEP items and results demonstrated reliable and consistent?

Examples of Questions Related to Cost Effectiveness

1. How reusable are NAEP materials?

2. How expensive (in terms of time and money) are scoring (e.g., machine) and reporting (e.g., printout) aspects?

3. What are "hidden costs" for time and training of users, administrators, and interpretors?

4. What interpretive aids (A-V, booklets, etc.) and services does NAEP offer?

5. How are NAEP scores reported in manners that will make them directly usable in decision-making processes?

6. Do the costs (apparent as well as hidden) of utilizing NAEP items, procedures, and results justify the use of these in light of benefits to the state?

7. How can NAEP help us economize our statewide reading assessment procedures by using accurate, stratified random sample selection techniques.

8. How can NAEP help us streamline our state assessment records and procedures so that we are not collecting data inefficiently and at unnecessarily high expense.

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